

# Colorado



Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment



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## Medical Reserve Corps Takes New Approach

Colorado is expanding its Medical Reserve Corps rapidly, with about 20 units to date. One enthusiastic unit of note is a partnership of a neighborhood organization and its closest hospital.

The neighborhood, called Heritage Eagle Bend, in Aurora, Colorado, is an “active adult” community of 1,500 homes and 2,200 residents age 55 and older. The foresighted neighborhood association board chartered an emergency preparedness committee in 2006. Its goals are to:

- Seek appropriate training and education in emergency preparedness procedures and techniques for residents.
- Plan and implement a program designed to encourage all Heritage Eagle Bend residents to be equipped to survive on their own for a minimum of three days, but preferably seven days or more.
- Identify and record Heritage Eagle Bend residents who are impaired and who may need help in an emergency; devise specific plans of action to implement.
- Devise a plan to prepare and qualify the Heritage Eagle Bend clubhouse and other facilities, if appropriate, as disaster shelters.

The active committee, which includes a fire department captain, a physician, a nurse, a psychologist, an EMT, and an Army pharmacist, immediately began learning the incident command system, and participating in disaster and emergency preparedness training from the Aurora Office of Emergency Management and first aid and CPR training from the Red Cross. Twenty-five residents completed a 30-hour Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) course as well, and one of the committee’s leaders is a member of the North Central Region Citizen Corps Council.

While the preparedness committee was soliciting equipment donations within its own community and from agencies in the area, the members became aware of the emergency preparedness work developing at Parker Adventist Hospital. Sensing an opportunity, the committee joined with the emergency preparedness committee at the hospital to form one of Colorado’s most unique Medical Reserve Corps units. Their efforts earned them the 2007 Public Health Hero of the Year Award from the Tri-County Health Department, which serves their county and two others in the metropolitan Denver area.

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The unit has identified its preparedness priorities with input from nearly all its residents. The emergency preparedness committee had surveyed community members in 2006 to identify people with special needs, people with special training and equipment such as four-wheel-drive vehicles, and potential volunteers. The survey netted an 87 percent response rate, pinpointing the community's concerns beginning with tornadoes and blizzards, but including pandemic flu, plane crashes, hazardous materials spills, extended power outages, and terrorism.

Shortly after their work began, the area was nearly paralyzed by two blizzards, which kept people at home for three days. The committee activated its snow emergency command center, staffing telephones 24 hours a day, identifying snowplowing priorities, and initiating contact with residents who have special needs, such as one person who relies on frequent dialysis. The snowstorms helped the committee identify areas in which the teams need more practice, and drills have become commonplace.

The Emergency Preparedness Committee conducted an emergency preparedness expo with equipment from the city's fire and police departments, animal rescue groups, a helicopter for medical transport, and the Salvation Army mobile kitchen. About 800 residents attended, learning more about the broad range of emergency services available, and how to prepare themselves for an emergency.

As a result of all their work, the committee members have their plans, incident command teams, and organizational charts at the ready, with nearly 200 volunteers. Another significant accomplishment is the outfitting of the clubhouse with medical supplies and equipment, blankets, cots, food, and a radio system. They developed and periodically test a communications plan to notify residents and manage media inquiries. They are working toward having a three-day emergency kit in every household.

The unit is not without its challenges. While the Medical Reserve Corps designation has opened some funding avenues, Heritage Eagle Bend continues to look for funding avenues. They hope to install a radio tower repeater eventually, as the geography interferes with radio communication. In the meantime, as most responder organizations do, Heritage Eagle Bend depends on amateur radio operators.

For information on volunteering in the public health and medical field, contact the Colorado Volunteer Mobilizer at <https://covolunteers.state.co.us/>.

## Partner Organizations

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- Parker Adventist Hospital
- Aurora Fire Department
- Aurora Police Department
- Aurora Office of Emergency Management
- Tri-County Health Department
- Aurora Community Mental Health
- Colorado Division of Emergency Management
- FEMA
- American Red Cross
- Salvation Army

## Additional Information

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